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Learning outcomes assessment revisited: A new instructor's perspective

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Poster Title: Learning Outcomes Assessment Revisited: A New Instructor's Perspective

Outcomes

By the end of this poster session you should be able to...

- Distinguish between aspects of Learning Outcomes Assessment that enhance information literacy instruction and elements that hinder it.

Date:

Friday, May 9, 2014

Total Time:

60 mins

Time	Instructor Activities	Learner Activities	Resources

Post Assessment:

Reflective Comments:

Figure 3: Lesson Plan Template, modified from the University of Guelph, Learning and Curriculum Support unit

Introduction

Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA) – also called Outcomes-Based Education – has been a key component of lesson planning in information literacy for some time now. The University of Guelph established Learning Objectives in 1987 (Kenny & Desmarais, n.d.). Acknowledging that, as a co-op student new to information literacy instruction, the ability to plan lessons using clear, concise, and directly stated outcomes was a tremendously useful, it is worthwhile to examine the roots of LOA. Drawing on institutional documents combined with readings in the LIS literature and critical pedagogy this poster attempts to visualize the critical dialogue that exists around the use of LOA as a tool of assessment from the level of individual lessons all the way through to the provincial/state-level.

Literature Review

The goal is to move away from a teleological conception of LOA. It grew out of a specific political context that is not value neutral. Yet descriptions of LOA's origins diverge slightly:

- Bennett & Brady (2012) trace the LOA movement in the US back to Taylorism and the scientific management theories of the early 20th century
- Seale (2013) asserts that learning outcomes are the result of the impact of neoliberalism on education where "learning is presumed to be quantifiable and is justified and valued economically" as a "return on investment"

Values in a Culture of Assessment

Learning Outcomes Assessment privileges what is measurable. In *A Guide to Developing and Assessing Learning Outcomes at the University of Guelph* it states, "be concise, direct and clearly stated. Terms such as *know*, *understand*, *learn*, *appreciate* and *to be aware* of should be avoided" (Kenny & Desmarais, n.d.). This emphasis on what students will be able to do results in what Brancalone calls a "skills bias that confers on education a direct form of exchange value, commodifying learning into goods for sale on the open market, as capital" (2011). This commodifying effect can be seen in the discourse surrounding LOA which in some cases seeks to actively change the

professional values of librarianship. In *Creating a Culture of Assessment: A Catalyst for Organizational Change*, Lakos and Phipps (2004) argue "[a] profession that inherently believes that it is a "public good" does not feel the need to demonstrate outcomes and articulate impact."

Conclusion

A critical look at LOA is not an argument against accountability. As Nitecki (2004) observed, libraries are service organizations and should be accountable to delivering the highest quality programs possible. Connecting with our users and empowering them to develop research skills is in everyone's interest. Further, information literacy instruction is frequently delivered in the one-shot format: limited to an hour or less of class time, sometimes with limited preparation. Under such strictures

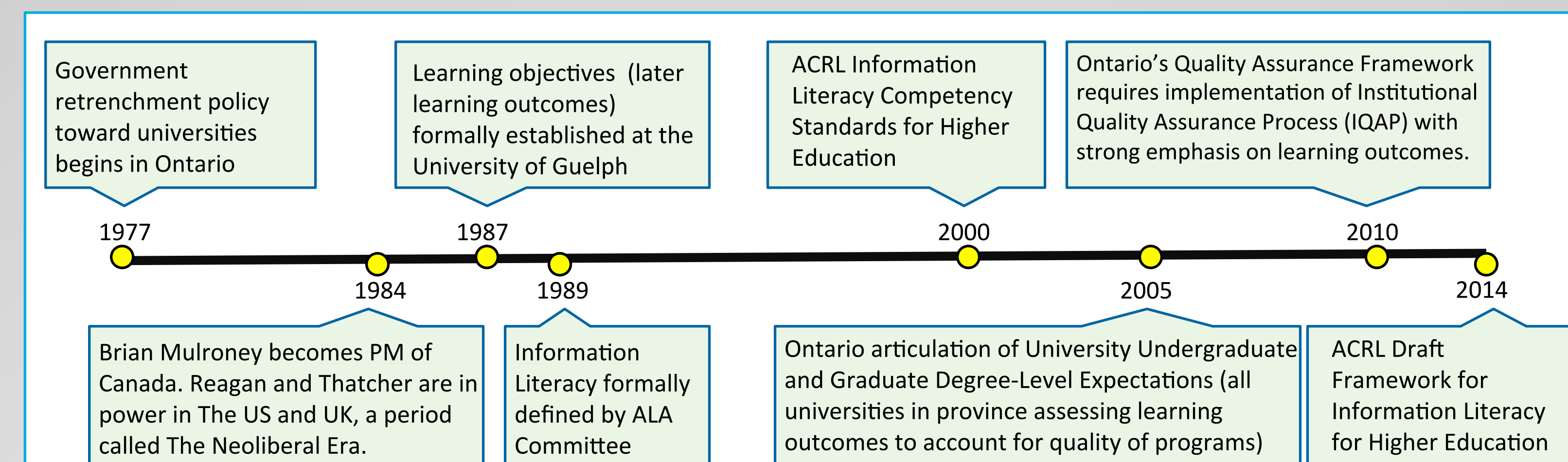


Figure 2: Outcomes assessment from the late 1970s to present

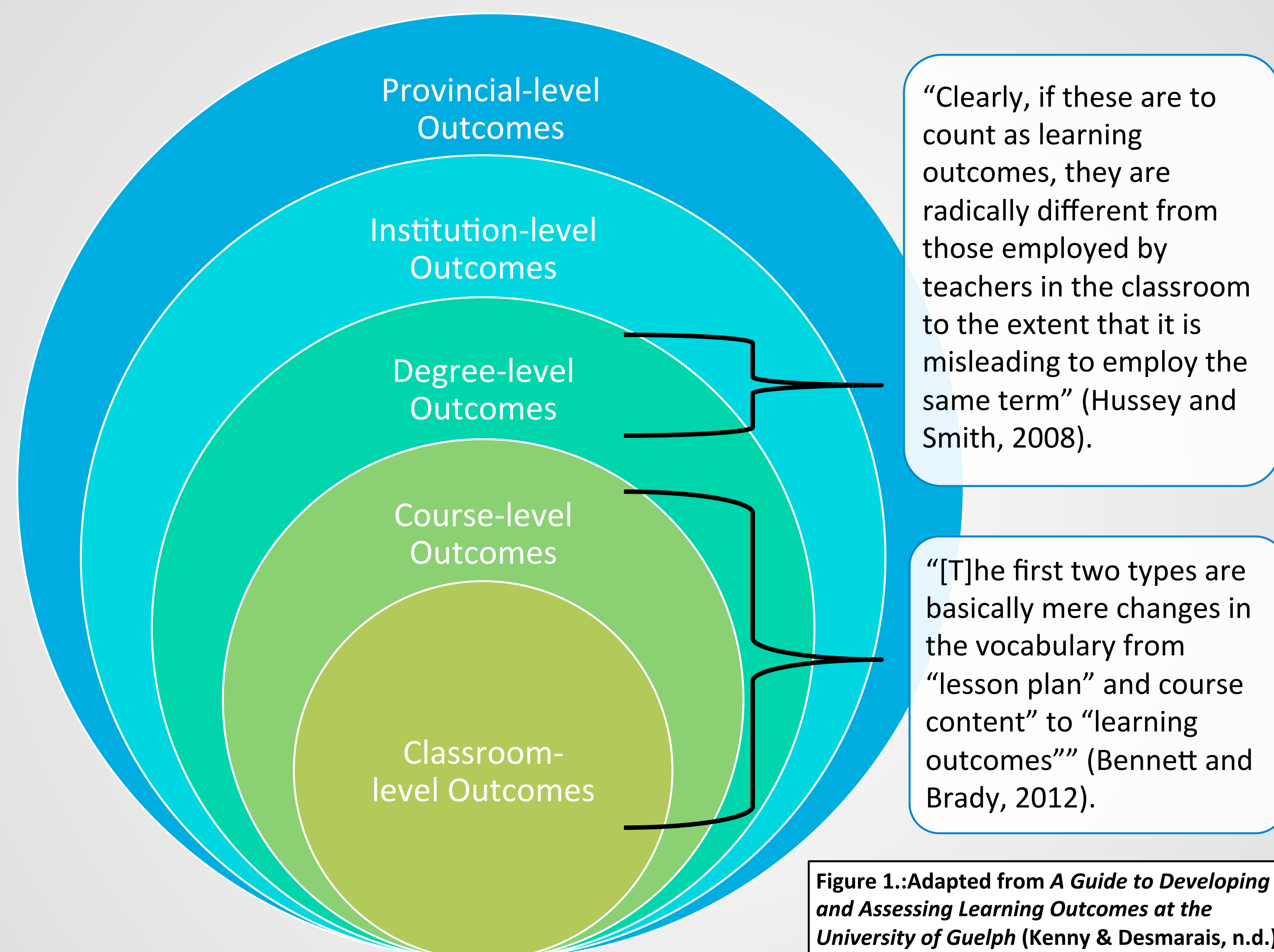


Figure 1.:Adapted from *A Guide to Developing and Assessing Learning Outcomes at the University of Guelph* (Kenny & Desmarais, n.d.)

learning outcomes allow us to align our efforts efficiently with focused lesson planning.

Figure 4 shows a modified version of the Lesson Planning Template currently in use at U of Guelph. Predicating the lesson on learning outcomes (typically three for a 50-minute lesson) the template recommends employing the BOPPPS method (Bridge, Outcome, Pre-Assessment, Participatory Learning, Post-Test, and Summary). This is a powerful lesson planning tool as it accounts for each minute of the lesson and makes it easy to identify and remove nonessential content.

As useful as learning outcomes assessment is at the lesson planning level, philosophically they are conveyed in corrosive managerial language. It places library professionals in a position where in order to be properly accountable they must adopt an attitude of "competition and of questioning every assumption" (Lakos & Phipps, 2004).

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